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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2008

In Today's Papers

White House Reacts to US Generals' Statements on Turkey and the PKK
All papers cover the White House's reaction to the statements of Lt. General Ray Odierno and Centcom Commander William Fallon concerning negotiations with the PKK. Mainstream Vatan writes that Fallon promotes compromise between Turkey and the PKK, but that late yesterday the White House announced that Turkey was not expected to negotiate with terrorists. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes under the headline "The White House Silences the Commanders" that Spokesperson Dana Perino said the US has not suggested Turkey should negotiate with the PKK.

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says the US was willing to work out a compromise between Turkey and the PKK in order to block the increasing influence of Iran in the region. Admiral Fallon reportedly said Turkey will have to seek "some kind of compromise" with the PKK to work out a real solution to the problem. Islamist-oriented Zaman's headline reads, "American Commanders Insist that Turkey Negotiate with the PKK." Mainstream Hurriyet quotes diplomatic sources as saying the American generals' statements have no impact on US-Turkey ties.

Gates: Non-Violent PKK Elements Could be Moved to Political Arena
All papers report Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told a press conference at the Pentagon the real target in the solution to the PKK problem is to "separate the ferocious terrorists from the elements who can be comprised and brought back in the system." Mainstream Hurriyet reports that during Gates' meetings in Ankara, President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan unveiled steps to be taken to ease the concerns of the Kurds and cut support for the PKK.

Talabani Due in Ankara Friday Evening

All papers report Iraqi President Jalal Talabani is to visit Ankara on March 7 on a one-day working visit, one week after the Turkish troops ended an eight-day ground offensive against the PKK in northern Iraq. Talabani will meet President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan to discuss PKK terror and Turkish cross-border

incursions as well as the status of Kirkuk. President Abdullah Gul will host a dinner in honor of Talabani; Ambassadors of Arab countries, businessmen, and politicians will attend. Mainstream Milliyet reports that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) claims, "Turkey should deal with the leader of the Kurdish Regional Administration (KRA) Massoud Barzani, and should recognize the Kurdish administration will tackle all problems, including the PKK, with Barzani." The paper notes there is not a KDP representative in the delegation accompanying Talabani to Ankara. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet writes Ankara expects "a powerful message" from Talabani against the PKK, and notes that Talabani has referred to the PKK as "a common plague." Cumhuriyet says Ankara would open a Turkish consulate in Basra soon, but not in Erbil.

Editorial Commentary on Talabani's Turkey Visit

Dialogue with the Kurds

Ihsan Dagi commented in Islamist-oriented Zaman (3/7): "Iraqi President Celal Talabani is coming to Ankara today. Even though this is a belated meeting, it is very important. Establishing dialogue with Iraqi Kurds, right after the land operation, could be a sign of a new approach. It wasn't coherent policy for Turkey to emphasize Iraq's territorial integrity while avoiding the president of the country. Moreover, following the Talabani visit, certain circles in Turkey should stop referring to Iraqi Kurds as a 'tribal community.' Since the only administration that is able to prevent the PKK from using northern Iraq as a base is the Regional Kurdish Administration, it is inevitable that Turkey must establish a dialogue with them. As a matter of fact, Iraqi Kurds desperately need such cooperation. The stability and the prosperity of northern Iraq depends on cooperation between Turkey and Iraq. Turkey should not be an enemy for the Kurds. Instead, we should be partners. Talabani's visit might be a turning point for the stability and

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cooperation in the region. Such a dialogue might open the way for dialogue within Turkey. If Turkey normalizes relations with northern Iraqi Kurds, it could ease Ankara's hand in economic and political initiatives for Kurds within Turkey."

Is Talabani Going to Say "the PKK is a Common Enemy?"

Bilal Cetin wrote in mainstream Vatan (3/7): "There are two issues which will be on the top of the agenda during Talabani's visit: First is PKK terrorism and Turkey's recent cross border operations; and second is the status of Kirkuk. These two issues are highly critical and agreements reached on these two issues will determine the future of the relations between Turkey and Iraq. Will Talabani behave differently from Massoud Barzani? Will he be able to repeat President Bush's remarks and say "Yes, the PKK is a terrorist organization and our common enemy?" This is the most critical issue. Turkish Diplomatic sources stress that during the Turkish delegation's recent visit to Baghdad, Talabani told them that "the PKK is the common enemy and we have to coordinate in the fight against it." Well, these remarks are the key formula to improving relations with the central government and with the regional Kurdish Administration. Most likely, Talabani will say "I agree on cooperation" behind closed doors, but, for the sake of his own public opinion and for the Barzani factor he may use a different style in front of the media."

Talabani's first stop in Ankara is Anitkabir

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal Radikal (3/7): "After he is greeted at the airport, Talabani will go to pay his respects at Anitkabir. He made a special request to do this. Talabani comes to Ankara one week after the land operations in northern Iraq ended. The MFA gave a short and simple answer as to why the visit is not official: bilateral relations are not at the level where an official visit is appropriate. The bottom line is the PKK is still in Iraq. It is hoped that Turkish investments in energy will take an important place in 2008, the year of Turkey's energy investment in Iraq. Talabani was not opposed to an official visit, but then the new Iraqi flag would have to fly in Ankara for the first time. Ankara has opposed this flag due to the incorporation of symbols for Kurdistan. Also, an official visit would include the military. Some in the military still see Talabani as a Peshmerge fighter with a history of contacts with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. But with a

working visit, the military is under no obligation to attend the events. Finally, Ankara is praying Talabani won't say anything at the press conference to make the Turkish public feel uncomfortable.
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Police Kills Kurdish Demonstrator, DTP MPs to be Tried
All papers report pro-Kurdish DTP protestors clashed with police in Ercis town in the eastern province of Van during the funeral of Mehmet Deniz, who died from injuries sustained during a protest earlier this week. At least 14 were injured and 101 were detained after clashes with police.

Meanwhile, liberal Radikal reports a prosecutor has launched an investigation into the pro-Kurdish DTP lawmakers Fatma Kurtulan and Sevahir Bayindir under article 302 of the Turkish penal code, which covers crimes against the unity of the state. If convicted, Kurtulan and Sevahir could be sentenced to life without parole. In addition, the prosecutor is requesting sentences between five and ten years in prison for DTP lawmakers Kurtulan, Osman Ozcelik, and Aysel Tugluk for their role in bringing back the Turkish soldiers abducted by the PKK in the Daglica attack.

State Body Criticizes High Court's Decision against Compulsory Religious Classes
Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report the head of religious affairs (Diyanet), Professor Ali Bardakoglu, defended compulsory religious classes and said they must continue to be taught on a mandatory basis in primary and high schools. Bardakoglu denounced the decision of the Council of State

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(Danistay), which ruled the religious instruction was unconstitutional. Education Minister Huseyin Celik said the Danistay decision would be a violation of the constitution, which stipulates the continuation of religious classes. The AKP deputy chairman Dengir Mehmet Firat said Danistay went beyond its authority in its decision. Turkey's Alevis object to compulsory religious classes and criticize Diyanet for favoring Sunni Islam in school curricula and textbooks. Alevis feel this violates their religious rights.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- The Constitutional Court has accepted the application from the opposition CHP and DSP to examine the recent constitutional amendments regarding headscarf reforms.
- Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis will attend a meeting organized by the ruling AKP's women's branch to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8.
- Investment bank ABN Amro expects macro-economic indicators in Turkey to improve next year and the year-end inflation to stand at 7.5 percent.

International News

- Armenian forces violate the ceasefire on the contact line between Azerbaijan and Armenia.
- Secretary Rice said Palestinian and Israeli leaders will resume the peace talks that were suspended after Israel launched a military offensive in the Gaza Strip.
- On Thursday, Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomeos I met Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican.

WILSON